

# Time's a wasting...

Twenty-nine thousand days. That is all we get to live and that's if we're fortunate to reach the ripe age of 80. So what do we do with them? People are very busy—working, looking for work, surviving with little or no paid work, running from here to there, cleaning/maintaining one's residence, etc. We're so busy that we often don't have time to consider if what we are doing will make us, individually or collectively, happier and healthier. The reasons why we are so busy deserve a look. Such an inspection provides us with insight to what we may be losing and what we can begin doing to change our lives in positive directions.

In modern times, we work like machines. We work day and night to pay the bills and accumulate wealth. But what exactly is "the plan" and why is it so coveted? What in fact is the intended purpose of our lives? Based on our behavior, many appear to think making money is the goal. This view is widespread. We seek education to make (future) money. We buy "high profile" items in the hopes that we'll be deemed successful and important. Yet in the seeking of these "goals," we sacrifice a lot. It isn't that education isn't important or that some level of comfort isn't warranted. Rather, it is the mindset that sees \$ as the goal that is the problem. The "work yourself to the bone" mentality that is justified in the name of \$ is not healthy and actually leads to elevated stress and sleep deprivation. Neither of these is good for one's health, happiness, or longevity.

We are so busy that we often take for granted the ones that we love. How common is this story: a husband comes back home exhausted from work and retires in front of the television, the wife is busy talking on the phone, and the children are on their personal cell phones or televisions? In the U.S., fifty percent of American parents spend fewer than ten hours a week together as a family (Impulse Research). In order to compensate for the little time they have for their kids, parents provide children with materialistic goods. However, as we know, these things do not make up for all the nurturing that kids are lacking. So, ultimately, children become more detached from their parents. Our "lack of time" leads to future social problems.

Money doesn't buy happiness. Excessively demand for material comfort can be hazardous to us, our society and our environment. We need to slow down and stop overextending ourselves with more work. Time spent with family, children and pursuing leisure will pay huge dividends for all.

Admittedly, many in our community must overwork just to get by. And since this is so, we really need to ask what type of society have we created where people don't have time for their kids, relaxation, or neighborliness. Despite this, our love affair with material goods continues unabated. Even young children are fixated on "bling, bling" now. The more we have, the more we want and, yet, we are never satisfied with what we have.

There is another reason to worry about our lack of time. According to political scientist Robert Putnam, "as individuals in a community interact, work together and trade favors, a level of trust and reciprocity form and this is what makes a community a community rather than just people living near each other." However, today's society has lost a lot in the areas of social interaction and cooperation. Very few have time for community activities or civic engagement. But since these are essential for a vibrant community, our cities are suffering as well. "Take Back Your Time Day?" is on Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>.

This date was chosen for two reasons: (a) it is nine weeks before the end of the year and we, Americans, work, on average, that much longer than our Western European counterparts (Americans are working ~1,900 hours per year); and, (b) it is the day that Americans got the 40-hour work week passed in Congress in 1940. But we are now working forty hours EVERY week (i.e., no vacation)! Something has got to change.

Things don't have to be this way. Coming from halfway around the world, i.e., Nepal, numerous things in Galesburg struck me (Kusum). Back home, parks are always filled with people socializing, eating organic fruits and appreciating nature. In Galesburg, parks are mostly empty and it is rare to even see people walking down the street; yet, people can be found driving, often solo, around in their cars. Passing through town in a four-wheeler limits what one can see. Slowing down, one gets a greater aesthetic appreciation and spiritual connection with existing nature. People are so centered on their day-to-day responsibilities that they often can't find time (or remember) to take a break and appreciate what is around them. As I (Peter) have begun to walk and bike more, I have become much more aware of dangers (broken bottles and sidewalks) as well as pleasures (church bells, "hellos" from passersby). Our lives depend on the



environment but we are so busy we fail to notice how much we have exploited it. Even if we do notice, we do not have the time to change our lifestyle or take precautionary measures to avoid further degradation.

If we reduce consumption and improve our relationships with our families and neighbors, we will be happier. If we set priorities and make quality use of our time, we might realize what we missed out on and what is important to us. When will we wonder where our children's childhood

went? When are we going to take a pause and ask ourselves, "Are our lives as fulfilling as they could be?" Start now. Build connections with family and neighbors. Adopt a new way of thinking. Don't let "busy" get you down. Find others who want to socialize. Work to develop an economy that doesn't torture us with endless work—perhaps by increasing the minimum wage or instituting a "living wage" for all. But, if nothing else, slow down a little ... and take back some time.

## A Halloween tale

by Joel Bjorling

*Note: This is a work of fiction. Enjoy it with your Halloween treats.*

I was researching a microfiche of old *Knoxville Journals* and found a chilling headline from the October 25, 1880 edition: "Grave Found Empty in Cemetery." Beneath it was the sketch of a young girl with a round face and curly, long hair. Her name was Jerusha Palm. Her grave at the Swedish Lutheran Cemetery was found empty. At thirteen, she died after a brief bout with consumption. She lived with her parents, younger brother and sister in a small house on the corner of Division and Grove Streets. She had become ill at school, and her mother took her home. The illness escalated into a high fever, with violent coughing, and she became delirious. She died two days later.

Less than two weeks after her burial, Jonas Persson, the cemetery caretaker, reported the startling news that Jerusha's grave was empty. When he came to work, it was surrounded by a large pile of dirt and only the hole remained. The wooden casket, still in the grave, was opened. There were dirty footprints in the grass that led from the gravesite to the cemetery entrance.

At the same time as Persson's discovery, Julia Swanson, age six, awoke screaming. She told her concerned parents that she heard a loud pounding at the back door. Her bedroom was next to it. When she looked through the door's small window, Jerusha Palm was standing outside, desperately begging to be let in. Her eyes were large and red, her hair was in mad disarray, and she was dressed in the white gown in which she was buried. "Let me in, please!" she shouted. "I'm cold and alone."

Jerusha had frequently babysat with Julia. They became very close. Julia was heartbroken when she died.

When Julia's father investigated, there was no one at the door. However, when he went to work the following morning, a trail of dirty footprints were on the back walk.

That was not the only report of Jerusha's nocturnal visitations. Amy Caughill, Jerusha's teacher, lived in a house on North Street. She said that there was loud pounding at her front door. When she looked out the window, she saw a girl who matched Jerusha's description. She had large, red eyes, a pale, blank facade, and was wearing a long, white gown that was rustled by the cool gusts of the fall wind.

A month later, Jerusha's appearances ended. Again, her grave was intact. Her parents moved to Bushnell and never returned to Knoxville. No one visited her grave, and with time, it aged, cracked, and began to sink into the earth. Upon investigation, all that is visible of it is about five inches of stone, with the worn etching of an angel and beneath it the name

"Jerusha."

I shared this story with friends. When I described Jerusha's clothing and appearance, one of them, who grew up in Knoxville in the 1930s, said that it sounded familiar. "When she was a teenager, walking home on Saturday night after seeing a movie at the Earl Theater, there was a strange-looking girl walking between the buildings on Main Street. She was hidden by the shadows. From what she could see, the girl had hair that reached down her back, and her face was grayish white. Her eyes were wide, bloodshot, and her steps left a trail of dirty footprints.

Does Jerusha Palm's soul remain restless? Is she still cold and alone, seeking her family, who have long since gone?

Did this really happen, or is it just a spicy treat for your Halloween goodies?

One word of advice – next time you hear a loud knock at your door after dark, don't answer it.

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